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Senate

The Senate met at 10:30 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. GRASSLEY).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Almighty God, preserver, redeemer, and judge, strengthen our Senators for their work today. Lord, provide them with the wisdom needed to handle challenges and pressures. As You illuminate their path with the light of Your wisdom, infuse them with patience to persevere in their efforts to do Your will.

In the storms and strains of leadership, may they not deplete their faith by majoring in minors and minoring in majors. Instead, may they trust You in the face of perplexities.

Empower them to practice the Golden Rule of treating others the way they themselves desire to be treated.

And, Lord, bless the National Prayer Breakfast program tomorrow.

We pray in Your holy Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MULLIN). Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Eric Turner, of Texas, to be Secretary of Housing and Urban Development.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

NOMINATION OF ERIC TURNER

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, sometime today, we are confirming Scott Turner as the new Secretary of Housing and Urban Development. As a former NFL cornerback, developer, State and local official, and Executive Director of the White House Opportunity and Revitalization Council, Mr. Turner understands the challenges facing American communities.

While the vast majority of housing and development issues are solved at the local and State level, I certainly understand how the Federal Government and the programs utilized by many Iowa individuals, families, and communities assist with making our cities the best place to live, work, and play.

I look forward to working with Scott Turner to advance Iowa's priorities and sound policies for our Nation.

Even though I did not meet with Scott Turner in my office, as I do with most nominees for the Cabinet, I stressed to him today the importance of responding to congressional letters and inquiries, and I will have an example on that in just a minute.

I want to explain that Congress has the constitutional duty to perform oversight over the executive branch and, as we learn in our high school government classes, what we call checks and balances. Congress not only passes laws and appropriates money, but we

have a responsibility to make sure that those laws are faithfully executed by whoever is President of the United States. Oversight then allows us to hold bureaucrats accountable to the rule of law, and it helps keep the faith with taxpayers, because, if we have transparency in government, we have greater accountability of the government product or lack thereof.

Let me give you an example where congressional oversight has been much needed at Housing and Urban Development. Congress passed legislation that became effective July 2013 that requires Federal contracts to include anti-retaliation protections for contractor employees. This works to make sure that whistleblowers are protected.

However, over the last decade, the HUD inspector general found that thousands of HUD contractors lacked these whistleblower protections because the Agency failed to adequately update past contracts to include whistleblowers and whistleblower protections.

Last August, following up on my responsibility to investigate, I requested answers and records about these findings, but Housing and Urban Development, under the Biden administration, failed to fully respond and provide responsive records.

I fully expect Mr. Turner, as the new Secretary, to respond to all the congressional inquiries in a timely and responsible manner.

I look forward to working with this new Secretary to support long-term housing and revitalization policies to keep our communities, our States, and our Nation strong.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The majority leader is recognized.

CABINET NOMINATIONS

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, tomorrow, the Senate will be voting on the nomination of Russell Vought to be Director of the Office of Management and Budget. I could talk about the extensive experience, policy experience, that has helped prepare him for this position, but Mr. Vought has an even bigger qualification for this position, and that is the fact that he has already held it. That is right. Mr. Vought has already served as Director of the Office of Management and Budget in President Trump's first administration, and so there is no question that he will be able to hit the ground running.

As Director of OMB, Mr. Vought will have the chance to address two key economic issues: cutting burdensome government regulations and addressing excessive spending.

Government regulation has a direct effect not only on our economy but on Americans' pocketbooks. Regulations can drive up Americans' energy bills. They can drive up the cost of housing, of a new car, of appliances. The list goes on and on.

The history of the past 4 years under the Biden administration is a history of burdensome new regulations. Republicans are determined to alleviate that regulatory burden for the sake of economic growth and to improve the lives of hard-working Americans, and I know that Mr. Vought will make getting rid of burdensome regulations a priority.

I know that Mr. Vought is already also committed, I should say, to addressing our spending problems. Our country is currently on a dangerous spending track, with debt held by the public set to hit a staggering \$52 trillion by 2035. That is not sustainable. Identifying ways to rein in our spending and to target government waste has to be a priority, and I am confident Mr. Vought will help lead that charge.

One of my top priorities for the Senate at the beginning of this year was processing President Trump's nominees. I am very pleased to say that Mr. Vought's confirmation will bring the total number of nominees confirmed since the inauguration to 13. That is roughly twice as fast as nominees were confirmed at the start of the two previous administrations.

The Senate will take up additional nominees next week, and we will maintain an aggressive pace to get the President's full team in place as soon as possible.

IMMIGRATION

Mr. President, while our focus in the Senate has been on nominees, we have managed to work in votes on a few pieces of legislation. Last week, the President signed one of those pieces of legislation into law.

The Laken Riley Act, which the President signed last Wednesday, is

Congress's first installment in our work to combat illegal immigration. It is not, of course, a comprehensive bill, but it will ensure that illegal immigrants who steal, assault a law enforcement officer, or kill or seriously injure another person are detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement instead of being allowed back out on the street. Had such a law been in place last year, it is possible that Laken Riley would still be alive today, and I am thankful that we were finally able to pass this important legislation. The Laken Riley Act joins the work the Trump administration has been doing to keep dangerous illegal immigrants off our streets.

Since President Trump's inauguration, his border czar and Homeland Security team, now led by Secretary Noem, have been working around the clock to take murderers, rapists, gang members, and other dangerous criminals into custody in preparation for being deported. Reading lists of crimes these individuals committed is horrifying, and it is incredible that they have been allowed to remain in our country. I am grateful that we now have a President who is serious about protecting Americans from criminal aliens.

Republicans in Congress are working on legislation to support the President's efforts, and we will ensure that the President has the manpower and detention space needed to detain and deport individuals who threaten the safety of our streets.

It has been a busy few weeks here in the Senate. I am looking forward to more as we continue to confirm the President's nominees and deliver on an agenda for the American people.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SHEEHY). Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Democratic leader is recognized.

DEPARTMENT OF GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, yesterday, Leader JEFFRIES and I announced legislation to stop unlawful meddling by DOGE or other entities in the Treasury Department's payments system. Our bill will deny access to the payment system by anyone designated as a "special government employee"—in other words, people who aren't required to disclose conflicts of interest.

Our bill will deny access to anyone with conflicts of interest or lack of appropriate clearance. Imagine where all the Federal funds are going out and someone has a conflict of interest and has access to those funds and can do something with them. That is a formula for waste; that is a formula that

makes sure that money isn't spent wisely but is spent to accommodate the needs of a special few.

And our bill will ensure that Treasury payments can only be accessed by those with proper clearance. Everyone should agree that making the government more efficient and more effective is a good thing. But DOGE's scorched-earth policies are dangerous and unlawful. That is their approach.

History shows that when this kind of stuff is done in the dark of night with no guardrails by a limited group of people who don't really know the programs they are dealing with, it leads to bad results. If Treasury payments were ever intentionally or even accidentally halted or manipulated, it could paralyze the economy.

DOGE has said they want to cut \$2 trillion, \$2.5 trillion from the budget—well, that is going to be massive cuts done, again, by people who don't know the programs, don't know the whole extent of what the government is doing. Some of it might be wasteful. Get rid of it. But much of it is good and needed. One mistake and people's Social Security benefits could freeze. One mistake and disability payments to veterans, loans to small businesses could all be in danger.

If DOGE's meddling caused us to default, it could compromise the full faith and credit of the United States, and that would hurt everybody because interest rates would go up on everything—cars, homes, you name it.

The OMB funding freeze last week was disastrous enough, but a DOGE funding freeze would be far worse if guardrails are totally thrown out the window. And that seems to be what is happening. We don't know any guardrails. They sure haven't been made public.

We should talk about reform here in the open, in the Halls of Congress, in the public forums of the people's government. That is how it has been done by Democrat, Republican, liberal, conservative for centuries because we all know—the Founding Fathers knew, historians know—democracy doesn't work in the shadows—autocracy does, not democracy.

Democracy does not skirt the rule of law. The American people deserve to have a seat at the table when these important decisions are made. But so far, DOGE is operating entirely in the dark.

Our legislation would correct it. We are going to do anything and everything we can legislatively to try and get this done. And maybe, at some point, we will get some help from the other side of the aisle if they see how bad DOGE's actions are.

NOMINATION OF RUSSELL VOUGHT

OMB and Vought. If you want to understand the risks of letting DOGE take over the Treasury Department, all you have to do is look at what happened last week at OMB. OMB unilaterally froze trillions in potential spending, and it unleashed chaos. That is